Shoreline
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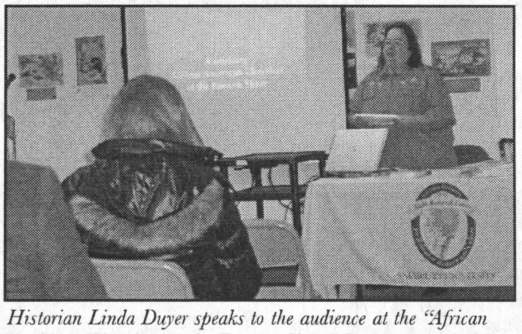
For the Members of the Edward H. Nabb Research Center for Delmarva History and Culture at Salisbury University

African-American Churches of the Eastern Shore

By Damika Baker

The church has long served as the center of the black community on the Eastern Shore. As a civic center, the church has often been the place where community members socialize and convene.

On December 8, the Edward H. Nabb Research Center for Delmarva History and Culture sponsored "African-American Churches of the Eastern Shore," a lecture with local historian Linda Duyer. Duyer examined a number of black churches located throughout the lower Eastern Shore, some of which have been demolished because the structures had fallen victim to time and the elements, while other structures have been maintained due to support from the community. One such church is Metropolitan United Methodist Church located in Princess Anne. The original congregation of Metropolitan UMC consisted of slaves who worshipped in the balcony of St. Andrews Episcopal Church in Princess Anne. In 1842, the congregation organized itself into a separate church. The original church was named the John Wesley Methodist Episcopal Church, but was renamed Metropolitan UMC in 1886 after a new building had to be built due to an increase in the size of the congregation.



Historian Linda Duyer speaks to the audience at the "African American Churches on the Eastern Shore" lecture, sponsored by the Nabb Center.

Duyer, a frequent speaker on African-American topics, was also recently featured on WBOC's "Heart and Soul", a news segment that focuses on faith and the community.

Duyer emphasized the overwhelming lack of documentary information about many of the churches she was describing. If anyone has any information about any vanishing or surviving African-American churches on the Eastern Shore, the Nabb Center would love to hear from you.

Damika Baker is the Nabb Center outreach coordinator and is currently pursuing a M.S. in non-profit and association management from University of Maryland University College.

John Walter Smith-Famed Shoreman

By Dr. William H. Wroten Jr.

The name of John Walter Smith is certainly a familiar one to many Marylanders. Although it has been said that no man in political life ever was born under a luckier star, it is doubtful whether any political leader in the state since 1900 has equaled his leadership and power.

Writing a little over 10 years after Senator Smith had left politics in 1920, an historian said: "No man in Maryland, in the past generation, has exerted a greater influence on the State and its people than John Walter Smith. Governor for four years, U.S. Senator for 13, undisputed leader of the Democratic Party for nearly two decades, his power has been felt in every county of the state and every ward in Baltimore City. It is not an exaggeration to say that his ascendancy, the full extent of which is grasped only by those who have had the privilege of intimate touch with the man, has been unselfishly used for the good of his state, his people and his party."

Senator Smith did not seek political honors or appear as a candidate for public office until he had reached the age of 44. While he did quietly labor on behalf of the Democratic Party, he spent his early life building a reputation as a successful businessman. On the Delmarva Peninsula the politician must bide his time, and usually success in the business world is the strongest recommendation. Farmers and watermen have strong leaning toward such a man as a candidate for public office.

John Walter Smith was born in Snow Hill on February 5, 1845. On both sides of his family, ancestors had resided in Worcester County for several generations and some of them had served their fellow citizens in public life. Although John Walter Smith had the misfortune of becoming an orphan at the age of five, he became the ward of Ephraim King Wilson, twice elected to the U.S. Senate.

Smith's formal education was gained in the primary schools and at the Union Academy of Snow Hill. He did not attend college but began his business career at the age of 18 as a clerk in the store of George S. Richardson and Brother. Subsequently he became a partner in the business which later operated as Smith, Moore and Co. He became active in many business enterprises of Snow Hill, Worcester County and throughout Maryland. He was active in organizing the First National Bank of Snow Hill in 1887, was one of the largest landowners in the county, and had interest in the oyster industry and insurance. He also was connected with institutions in Baltimore and other parts of the state.

Smith's roots were deep in Worcester County, and even after his elections to the governorship and the senate, he maintained his residence in Snow Hill. The Smith home had the reputation of being a center of true Eastern Shore hospitality. Heinrich E. Buchholz wrote that: "Even the most violent political enemies of the ex-governor admit that for courteous manners and hos-

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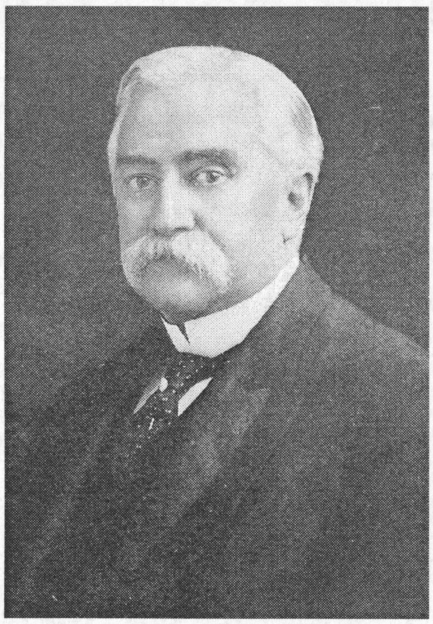
pitable instincts the Worcester Countian has no superiors, and nowhere are these characteristics seen to better advantage than when Mr. Smith is the host of his friends in his Snow Hill home."

It was in 1889 that Smith decided to throw his hat into the political ring and to represent Worcester County in the State Senate. He was elected then and re-elected again in 1893 and 1897. In 1894 he was elected president of the State Senate. Although his years in the Maryland General Assembly were successful, it was during this time that he experienced the first of two major political disappointments.

Smith was a master of local politics, and even with many obstacles and battles to overcome he was ambitious from the start for high offices. When his close friend Senator E.K. Wilson died in 1891, Smith announced his candidacy for the vacant seat. Charles H. Gibson, seemingly, was more acceptable to the political leaders of the Western Shore and was chosen over Smith.



John Walter Smith

But Smith found the path to higher office in 1898. Two years previously, the Republicans had captured the First Congressional District of Maryland, but in 1898 Smith was prevailed upon to regain it for the Democrats. From the newspaper accounts, the political battle of 1898 was a memorable one with Smith coming out on top. Smith did not serve long in the House as he was elected govenor in 1899.

One of the major events of Smith's administration was the special session of the legislature called in 1901. His supporters claimed this special session was to clear up the frauds "perpetrated in the census returns for the decade of 1900, which, if they remained uncorrected, would result in allowing an unjust representation in the House of Delegates to the Republican counties." But another man said that the session was for the purpose "of passing a new election law which everybody knew had for its purpose making the State more solidly Democratic."

Smith's fame does not rest upon such selfish political moves. His achievements, although they brought honor to him, were for the people of Maryland. An earlier biographical account of Smith's life states: "There stand today in Maryland many monuments to Sen. Smith's political control and public spirit. Chief among these are: Passage of the first free schoolbook law for the state; reorganization of the public school system, and removing it from the realm of political influence, and providing for a superintendent of public education; reorganization of the State's Agricultural College, and removing it from private control; aiding in the first Workmen's Compensation Enactment, i.e., for the miners, when such legislative acts were rare; divorcing the Baltimore City police system from politics and providing that appointments and promotions should be based upon merit; revision of the election machinery and eliminating partisan control; correction of errors and inequalities due to a fraudulent federal census; reorganization of the health laws; establishment of a State Sanatorium at State Sanatorium, MD., for tubercular white citizens of Maryland, and a similar institution at Henryton for colored citizens; and providing vital aid to the shipping and agricultural interests of Maryland.

"These are among the larger of his public services, but they do not begin to tell the complete story. In every section of the state there are scores of men who can bear witness to the unflagging zeal, remarkable efficiency and energy of Mr. Smith as governor of Maryland. His administration of the affairs of the state stands as an enduring monument to his energy, vision and business ability. It is a fact during the four years of his term the state did more building than in the 20 years prior to his election in 1899. It was during the Smith administration that the splendid Court of Appeals Building at Annapolis was constructed, that the old State House was rebuilt and greatly enlarged; that the 5th Regiment Armory in Baltimore, one of the finest halls in the U.S. and the place where Woodrow Wilson was nominated in 1912, was built; that the Maryland Penitentiary was built; and the capacity of the House of Correction doubled."

The remarkable thing is that, notwithstanding this amazingly comprehensive building program, all of which was planned and executed under Governor Smith, "he so wisely and skillfully managed the finances of the state that, when he went out of office in 1904, the State of Maryland was practically free from debt."

Very few, if any men, accomplished so much or worked so hard as Governor Smith did for his two pet interests: education and health for the masses.

He was re-elected Senator in 1913 by popular vote, as the U.S. Constitution had at that time been amended and the direct popular vote was in effect. He was defeated for re-election in 1920 when a Republican wave covered the country. When he was asked to seek the office again in the 1922 election, he declined, announcing that he had retired, but would work as long as he lived on behalf of his friends.

Smith had a great influence in the Senate and leaders of both parties held him in affection. The story is told that when he was interested in an appropriations bill or carrying on a personal fight to amend a bill, senators would smile and say: "Smith is interested in this. You might as well let him have it now. He will get it anyway." Even after he left the Senate, through the friendships he had with the leaders of both parties, Smith was able to influence legislation.

According to some, Smith's greatest traits were his indomitable courage, the rigid regard for his word, and the way he stood by his friends, regardless of the personal fortunes.

A columnist for the *Wicomico News* in 1914 had this to say about "The Old Man," as Smith was fondly called by his close friends: "He has made and unmade Governors, Senators and Congressmen in his political career and has always been successful in making places for his friends ... There has probably never been another man in Maryland politics who has had such a wonderful run of good luck as Sen. Smith. His success has been so phenomenal there are many people who believe he bears a charmed political life and that it is useless to fight him when once he is a candidate. Be this as it may, there is no man who has had such a wonderful era of office holding and political successes as this man from Worcester who has been able to stand upon the field of battle and see every foe vanquished and disap-

peared, and whose fortunes still stand out foremost and whose guiding star still leads him towards the goal of political successes and achievements."

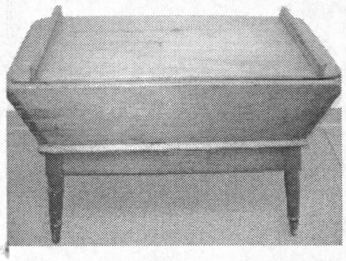
Foe and friend alike agree that John Walter Smith of Worcester County was one of the most outstanding, accomplished, influential and interesting political leaders the state of Maryland has seen.

Dr. William H. Wroten, Cambridge, MD, native, was the former chair of the History Department at Salisbury University until his retirement in 1980 and author of *Assateague*.

Note: The text above was originally printed as part of the "Delmarva Heritage Series" in the *Salisbury Times* in 1956. Smith's Queen Anne style home in Snow Hill, MD is the site of the Nabb Center's "Victorian Springtime in Snow Hill" event April 30.

New Acquisition: Kitchen Dough Box

By G. Ray Thompson, Ph.D.

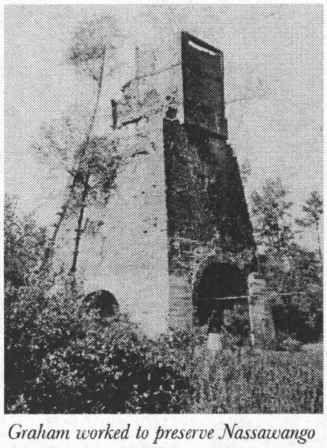


The dough box/raiser was one of the prized pieces of any 18th or 19th century Delmarva household. Bread was a diet staple, so large quantities of bread had to be made. Traditionally, bread had served as a "plate" for food. Since that "plate" was not reuseable, bread had to be continually replenished. Kept close to the fireplace, the breadbox stands as a mute reminder of the back-breaking labor involved in even the simplest of kitchen tasks performed by the wife and daughters of any household. A functional piece, the breadbox was durable and in recent generations, when baking large quantities of bread was no longer necessary or desirable, it might serve as a side table, a visible remembrance of a bygone time.

Our breadbox was donated by Barbara Townsend Nichols of Worcester County, MD. Found in a local farmhouse, the breadbox was rescued and has now, thanks to the generosity of Mrs. Nichols, become a treasured part of our Delmarva folkways collection.

Local Preservationist Gains Recognition

By G. Ray Thompson, Ph.D.



Graham worked to preserve Nassawango Iron Furnace, in Worcester County—Maryland's only bog ore furnace.

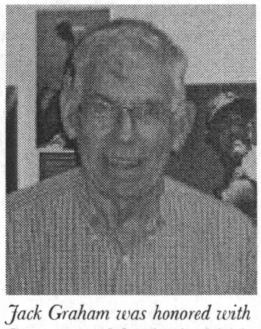
In November 2010, Preservation Maryland named John (Jack) L. Graham as a recipient of the President's Award, its most prestigious accolade and recognition of lifetime achievement in the field of preservation. For much of his adult life, Jack has been in the vanguard of preservation. Intentionally very involved in efforts to preserve both historic buildings and sites throughout the lower Eastern Shore, Jack's background as an architect offered him an unusual perspective of being able to analyze buildings and to "sense" their preservation worthiness. He has worked on all levels—grass-roots, regional and state-wide—to preserve the Shore's historic past. A modest, unassuming man, he has always placed the buildings and sites that he has so lovingly worked to preserve front-and-center in publicity. Jack knew that focusing on a site or structure was the surest way to preserve it.

Jack's love for the lower Eastern Shore and its architectural heritage is evident in his becoming actively involved in local preservation efforts. His eye for preservation initially led him to begin work on historic Cellar House on the Pocomoke River. Between 1966 and 1973, he worked steadily to preserve one of the most picturesque sites along the lower Pocomoke River. At the same time, he devoted untold hours toward the restoration efforts of Pemberton Hall in Wicomico County. Without the efforts of Jack and a small but devoted cadre of "old house lovers," as they were called at the time, Pemberton Hall would certainly have fallen before the wrecking ball. Now, Pemberton Hall is the finest surviving example of Colonial plantation architecture open to the public in Wicomico County. Not only has the house been preserved, but the integrity of the area surrounding the house has been preserved so that visitors might gain a feeling of what the house looked like in its original environment.

Among Jack's other achievements include working to preserve the Nassawango Iron Furnace, near Berlin, MD, and Henry's Grove, a fine mid-18th century Georgian structure in Worcester County, another structure that might well have been demolished had it not been for the vigilant eyes of preservation-conscious Jack Graham and others like him. Without Jack's initiative, the Humphrey Humphreys house in Salisbury might not stand today. It remains the best-preserved example of a mid-19th century Italianate house in Salisbury, one of only two of its kind remaining in this city, having survived the 1860 and 1886 fires that destroyed much of the remainder of the city. Poplar Hill Mansion, the oldest surviving home in Salisbury, originally a plantation house surrounded by farmland, is another significant preservation success in which Jack played a significant role.

One of the oldest private homes on the Lower Shore, Williams Conquest, with elements of the structure dating to the 17th century, is yet another building on which Jack spent innumerable hours in study and research, culminating in its preservation. Currently, Jack is working with a Dorchester County Consortium to preserve historic Handsell House and turn it into a tri-racial community-use building, while, at the same time, maintaining its historical and architectural integrity.

Jack has not allowed himself to be limited by county borders: he has been a preservation leader in all the counties of the Lower Shore—Worcester, Wicomico, Dorchester, Talbot and Somerset. Truly, he has had a vision of preserving the best of Delmarva for future generations. Thanks, Jack, for your continuing efforts to keep the heritage of Delmarva alive. Your President's Award is richly deserved.



Jack Graham was honored with Preservation Maryland's 2010 President's Award for more than 40 years of outstanding leadership and commitment to preserving and restoring the historic architecture of Maryland's Eastern Shore.